

# Chapter Nine



## Mark 9:1-13

*“He is the radiance and the glory of God, the exact imprint of His nature...”*

– Hebrews 1:3

The disciples are finally starting to figure out that they are in something much bigger than they had imagined when they left their boats and tax stations. Peter just announced that Jesus is the Messiah, though he has no idea what that means. Then, Jesus explained to them what it means to be “the anointed one” in His coming death and resurrection. Unfortunately, this teaching was beyond their understanding. In this text, the identity of Jesus is made blatantly clear before the eyes of Peter, James, and John. Jesus takes these three disciples up on a mountain where he is transfigured into His glory as God the Son.

Reading this passage without pausing to understand its significance would be easy, but lets not miss how important and wild this event is. There are some very crazy things going on in this passage. A man just morphed into God-like appearance. His clothes changed, his skin probably changed, the entire mountainside probably changed, and two famous dead guys are walking around talking to Him! (side note: Although it is actually Moses and Elijah who greet Jesus on the mountain, their presence also serves as a metaphor for the Trinity. Moses represents God the Father and the Law. Elijah represents God the Holy Spirit. See Malachi 4:4-6). The audible voice of God (not to mention His presence) booms out from a cloud. Witnessing this type of thing would radically change your life! It is that moment of clarity where Jesus shows you who He is and what He did for you. The disciples are scared to death because they are standing in the glory and holiness of God. To do so reveals the great depravity of man (Isaiah 6:5, Dt 5:23-26). Then, everything suddenly goes back to normal. This is wild. This is monumental.

Peter’s words on the mountain and their discussion on the way down are evidences that the disciples are still somewhat confused about Jesus and the story they are involved in. They’ve just seen Jesus revealed as God and now He’s telling them He’s going to die and rise from dead. That is a lot to comprehend. They don’t know how to address the teaching that Elijah would come before the Messiah to pave His way.

Jesus’ words explain it for them. He is the Messiah, and Elijah has come as the Scriptures foretold. His words recall the events recorded in Chapter 6. Elijah was John the Baptist who was killed by Herod. This incredible event was used to show with great clarity that Jesus was God with us, God the Son, the Messiah, our Redeemer.

### LifeGroup Study Questions:

**Discussion:**

Tell about how Jesus revealed who He really was to you.

**Understanding/Application:**

How should this text affect the way we view Jesus? What does it reveal about Him?

How has knowing Jesus as your Savior changed you?

Do you sometimes have doubts about Jesus? How do you work through those?

How has Jesus answered your questions about His identity and desire for your life?

**Further Scripture:**

1 Corinthians 2:2

Philippians 3:1-11

Colossians 1:15-20

Hebrews 1:3

## **Mark 9:14-29**

*“Thy grace alone, O God, to me can pardon speak;  
Thy power alone O Son of God, can this sore bondage break.  
No other work, save Thine, no other blood will do,  
No strength save that, which is divine, can bear me safely through.”  
– Horatius Bonar, “Not What My Hands Have Done”*

As Jesus comes down from the mountain, the reader should be reminded of Moses' return from Mount Sinai. The Israelites feared Moses because his face shone with the glory of God (Ex 34:29-35). Likewise, the people notice something about Jesus when He comes down. They put their argument on pause for a moment and rush in amazement to be with Jesus. Something about His presence or appearance stops them in their tracks. They had no other reaction but to run to Jesus.

They approach Him in regards to an intolerable demon that can't seem to be dispelled by the disciples. Jesus' burdened expression indicates His frustration with their faithlessness. The demon sees Jesus and reacts in defiance. However, Jesus commands the demon and it obeys. Notice here that Jesus states that this kind of demon can only come out with prayer; it does not say that Jesus cast it out through prayer rather it was through His authority. Here, Jesus' actions set Him apart from the disciples. They were faithless. He was faithful. They must pray to cast this demon out because the ability to do so doesn't come from within them but rather from God. Jesus' encouragement to pray is an encouragement to grow closer in fellowship with God that leads to growth in faith that can cast the demon away. Jesus did not need to pray because He was already in close fellowship with Jesus. Prayer was not what was lacking but rather communion with the Father.

This is an important lesson for us. It is impossible to do anything without God (John 15:5). Often times, however, this is exactly what most folks attempt to do. Man most often tries to live life, serve in ministry, and earn their way back to God by their own efforts. Even ministers can be so prideful in that they would sooner go out and do their ministry than pray. This indicates that our faith is actually in ourselves and in the notion we can handle it by ourselves. We trust in our own abilities to teach, comfort, and attract people to the Gospel rather than God's Spirit to draw them in. The Scriptures teach that no amount of human effort can heal and save people; only God can change hearts. Christ changes hearts and brings new life, not us.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

Describe a time in life where you have had to depend solely on God.

**Understanding/Application:**

Why couldn't the disciples cast the demon out?

Which do you tend to rely more on: your own abilities or God's? Why?

What makes it difficult to trust God more than yourself?

In what ways have you seen the truth that only God can change hearts evident in your life and in the lives of those around you?

What are some things you need to be relying on Jesus to handle currently?

**Further Scripture:**

1 Corinthians 3:7

Ephesians 3:20

Isaiah 46:8-13

Isaiah 40:28-31

## Mark 9:30-50

*“Out of unrest and arrogant pride, Jesus, I come; Jesus, I come.  
Into Thy blessed will to abide, Jesus, I come to Thee.”  
- William Sleeper, “Jesus, I Come”*

Upon hearing the Gospel come out of Jesus’ lips yet again in 9:31, it is almost comical that the disciples still do not understand. In 8:31, Mark explains that Jesus “said this plainly,” yet the disciples are baffled that their King, who will rescue them from slavery, would die and that the resurrection would refer to just one man rather than to the resurrection of everyone at the end of time. They are still blinded by their presuppositions and their own selfish ambition. The reason they are afraid to ask Jesus about this saying is because He just finished saying the same thing about ten days ago and when Peter questioned Him, Jesus called Peter “Satan” (8:33). Now, what was Jesus’ rebuke against Peter in chapter 8? It was that Peter was “not setting [his] mind on the things of God but on the things of man.” The disciples are not looking for the glory of God, nor to the ways of God, but are looking instead to the glorification of God’s people, themselves, and the restoration of their national pride.

The disciples have just been shown the glory of Jesus twice, they just recently heard that devotion to Christ means the death of the self, and Jesus just explained that He must be raised from the dead, yet what do they talk about? They begin to bicker about which of them is the greatest! Laughing at the disciples’ evident foolishness would be easy, but honestly, they are the very image of many of us today. In our lives, we constantly strive to be “good Christians” not because Jesus is great and worthy of praise, but because we want for people to think fondly of us and receive their praise. We want the glory. You could say that we are glory thieves, constantly trying to steal the glory due to Christ and to get it for ourselves. The disciples here are glory thieves.

Jesus uses a child to teach the disciples about humility. He is bringing their feet back down to earth and reminding them that they are not as important as they think that they are. He is showing them the attitude of heart that He desires is one that cares for even the least of society (children were marginalized in ancient societies). This lesson is a stark contrast to their self-seeking gain. Followers of Jesus should not be concerned with themselves, but with others especially the lowly.

Jesus’ calling for humility and the disciples lack thereof becomes even more evident in John’s story in the next few verses. Look at the reason why they stopped the man casting out demons. Though he was casting demons out in Jesus’ name, in other words, though he was following Jesus (and having faith in Jesus rather than himself and therefore being successful in spreading the Kingdom unlike the disciples earlier in the chapter), they stopped him because he was not following them. They stopped him because he wasn’t a part of their

special clique, and so they thought that he wasn't entitled to do these things. They stopped him due to their own pride and selfish motivation.

Jesus' next words do not come lightly. He attacks pride, selfishness, as well as all other sins head on. He warns the disciples if their sin, specifically referring in this case to their pride, leads anyone into sin and away from Him the consequences would be extremely severe. He encourages them, as well as us today, to guard ourselves against sin, not only for our own sakes but for those who look to us and follow our example. If we claim His name, we ought to be pointing people towards Jesus in everything we do. Otherwise, it will not go well for us.

You could entitle this entire chapter "The Glory Chapter." The key thread throughout it is to stop looking to ourselves and to keep our eyes set on Jesus. Throughout the chapter, Mark reminds us that it is about God's glory, not our own. This is why we see Jesus transformed. This is why Peter is wrong in his hasty words. This is why the disciples are stopped in mid-argument. This is why the demon obeys Jesus' command. This is why the disciples were unable to cast out the demon (They were not relying on Jesus' power in humility). This is why the disciples are confused about the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is why they argue about who is the greatest. This is why they stop the man who is not one of the disciples from spreading the Kingdom. To Him be all glory, honor, and praise... not us.

LifeGroup Study Questions:

**Discussion:**

What do you think true humility is? What does that look like?

**Understanding/Application:**

The disciples were more concerned with their own glory than God's how do you do the same?

Who are the lowly in our society? How do you take part in serving them?

How does your sin affect others? What do you think the long-term effects of your witness would be if things don't change?

To who or to what does your life direct other people towards currently?

**Further Scripture:**

Philippians 2:3-8

Galatians 1:10

1 Corinthians 4:1

2 Corinthians 3:18



# Chapter Ten



## Mark 10:1-12

**“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”**

– Mark 10:9

The Pharisees wanted to gather some incriminating evidence against Jesus by getting him to contradict the laws that Moses had given the nation of Israel. In this case, the goal was to get Jesus to contradict Deut 24:1-4. All Pharisees agreed that this Old Testament passage permitted divorce, that only the husband could initiate it, and that divorce implied the right to remarry. But they disagreed on the grounds for divorce. Some said that divorce should only be allowed if the wife was guilty of adultery. Some said that a husband should be allowed to divorce his wife for almost any reason provided he protected her from the charge of adultery by writing out a certificate of divorce in the presence of witnesses, signing it, and giving it to her so she could clear her name if she was ever accused of cheating. Jesus cuts through their questioning regarding when divorce is acceptable by saying that Moses had written this law because of their hard hearts that refused to accept God's view of marriage. Moses acknowledged the presence of divorce in Israel but did not institute or authorize it. This is a somewhat similar scenario as God giving instruction on how to respond when someone steals from you. He is in no way condoning theft, but acknowledging that it does happen in a broken, fallen world full of greedy, selfish people...and we need to know how we ought respond to it. Divorce, though never God's intent for marriage, does in fact happen. So, God, through Moses, taught how to respond to it. The Pharisee's, though, had taken this instruction and twisted it to mean that divorce is acceptable, so long as some conditions are met. Jesus responds to them by saying that they have almost entirely missed God's heart for marriage.

He then contrasts their view of marriage with God's view from the beginning of creation. Starting in verse 6, Jesus outlines God's pattern for relationships... He begins with the man and how God made him responsible to leave his mother and father in order to join with his new wife. Gentlemen, very practically this means, get a job, move out of your mom and dad's house, and get a life. *Then* you will be ready for a wife. A guy with no job and no life direction, who is still relying on his parents for support and provision, simply isn't ready for a wife. Apparently, Jesus could look through time and see the average American male sitting on his bean bag chair, eating Doritos's, and lacking a decent job or any real ambition other than conquering the next level of a video game. Curiously, these guys still feel qualified to date and woo God's daughters. Jesus teaches here that marriage is for men. Any guy who is wasting his life and consistently seeks to avoid responsibility doesn't qualify.

The question that many lazy, apathetic males ask regarding jobs, ministry, and other responsibilities is, “Why should I?” Graciously, Jesus has answered that question. <sup>6</sup>*“But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and*

*female.<sup>17</sup> 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife<sup>18</sup> and the two will become one flesh.'* God made them male and female and FOR THIS REASON a man will move out, get a job, and get a life. Jesus knows that all the motivation required for a guy is that God has made females. The potential for a wonderful female to become his wife is exactly the motivation that a guy needs to propel him forward in becoming a man first, then a husband.

Jesus then continues quoting from Genesis by saying the intention for the married couple is to become “one.” In Deuteronomy, God is described as “one.” The word for one in Hebrew is “echad.” The bible teaches that, though our God is Father, Spirit, and Son, He is “echad.” In the same way, though a married couple is man and women, they are to be “echad.” God has designed marriage to be a reflection of the “one-ness” that the Trinity shares.

In light of this, Jesus says we should not separate what God has joined together because it functions as a picture of Himself and the Trinity that will never separate. Jesus brings even greater emphasis to this in verses 11-12. He says that if you get a divorce and marry someone else, you are cheating on your first spouse because there is no such thing as divorce. When God joins people together, then they are joined together. Period. Jesus is stepping it up from the standards Moses set like He does with other laws (anger and murder). He strikes at the heart of the matter.

According to Ephesians 5, marriage is also a tangible picture of Jesus' relationship with the church. Marriage is bigger than just a guy and a girl who like each other. It's the clearest physical representation of the relationship Christians have with Jesus. Jesus humbly lays down his life as a sacrificial leader just as we humbly submit to His leadership and direction. This is why divorce really isn't an option for Christians. Our Trinitarian God will never break up just as Jesus will never separate from His Church. God designed marriage to reflect these relationships. Elsewhere in Scripture, the disciples will express that it is better not to marry if these are God's guidelines. Jesus responds by saying that it is tough for men to accept, but those who can accept it should. (Matthew 19:10-12)

Regarding marriage, there are two commitments Christians should make to each other and to God; neither of which are common in our culture.

#1 – a commitment to stick it out in good times and bad.

#2 – a commitment to work on making the marriage as good as it can possibly be through the power of God the Holy Spirit.

So why is divorce so common and “normal” in America? Among many other reasons, Americans are very pre-occupied with comfort and ease, and marriage seldom is comfortable or easy. More often, God uses marriage to expose what has been lying hidden in our hearts all along...self centeredness, pride, arrogance, indifference, apathy, anger, bitterness, etc. Discovering this about

ourselves is neither comfortable or easy and therefore many people choose to divorce rather than face their sin head on, hand it to Jesus, and put it to death by the grace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### LifeGroup Study Questions

#### **Discussion:**

Have you ever seen or experienced a marriage that truly was a reflection of both God's relationship with the Trinity and Jesus relationship with the church? Describe what it was like.

#### **Understanding/Application:**

What do Jesus' instructions on marriage and divorce mean for the roles of men in relationships? What about the roles of women?

In what ways do you notice marriages falling short of God's vision (even "Christian" marriages)?

How should your marriage change in light of what Jesus has taught here?

#### **Further Scripture:**

Ephesians 5:22-32

Matthew 19:1-12

Genesis 2:18-24

## **Mark 10:13-16**

*“Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His works in vein  
But God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain.”  
-William Cowper, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way”*

The word “faith” gets thrown around quite a bit. Often, people say they have faith in Jesus without ever really knowing what that means. In America, having “faith in God” to some people simply means believing that He exists. Often, after having a spiritual experience or making it through rough times we say that our faith was strengthened. There are volumes upon volumes of theology and commentary written on what faith looks, feels, and acts like; yet, Jesus explains it in just four verses. According to Jesus, the only true way to truly participate in God’s kingdom is to have the type of reckless, trusting faith that children have.

What type of faith, then, do children have? Jesus isn’t contending that those who trust Him shouldn’t ask questions or have doubts. Rather, Jesus is saying that like a child, believers must depend on one greater than them to survive. We must trust in Jesus. A child can’t protect him or herself. A child can’t farm or get food for him or herself. A child cannot do anything for him or herself. This is precisely the position Jesus calls us to take as well. We cannot do anything on our own. There is no way for us to make ourselves right before God. Sin has completely and permanently separated us from God without Christ. We cannot be moral enough, we cannot do enough good things, we cannot say enough right words or pray enough prayers, or any thing else to make ourselves worthy before God. Literally, we are without hope on our own. Jesus is calling us to realize that He is the only hope we have and to have faith that through Him we are saved and made righteous before God.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

What does our culture say that faith is? What is a follower of Jesus by the world’s standards?

What does Scripture say faith is? What does Scripture say a follower of Jesus looks like?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

What does pure faith look like in your life? Have you ever walked in what felt like complete trust and faith in Jesus?

What is keeping you from trusting in God for grace? for forgiveness? for acceptance? for provision?

**Further Scripture:**

Habakkuk 2:4

Luke 17:5-6

Romans 1:16-17

Romans 3:21-31

Galatians 2:20-21

Hebrews 12:3-11

## Mark 10:17-27

*“On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”  
-Edward Mote, “The Solid Rock.”*

In this portion of chapter 10, we find the narrative of the rich young man. In addition to being young and wealthy, the other gospels' accounts of this story refer to him as a “ruler.” In this context, “ruler” would refer to him being a leader in the local synagogue. This, combined with his insisting that he has always kept God's commandments, means that the man *thought* he was accepted by God, and he simply wanted Jesus to affirm this belief. When he asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Mark includes a significant detail of the story that we don't find in Matthew or Luke's account: it says that Jesus, looking at him, *loved* him, and then told him he must give everything away. He realizes that the man on some level wants to follow Jesus, but that currently he only trusts in his earthly riches and his self-accomplished morality. So because Jesus *loved* him, he tells the man the one thing he must do. The man must replace his trust in money and independence with complete trust and dependence on Jesus to provide.

Jesus is not saying that selling your possessions is a prerequisite for salvation. Instead, He is insisting that in an honest pursuit of Jesus, He will *always* call us to give up the one thing that we trust more than Him. For some people, he will go after money and possessions. For others it will be relationships. For others it will be porn. No matter what it is, Jesus will not let your idol go unmentioned or unnoticed. If you are pursuing obedience, there should come times where you ask Jesus how you can serve him better. Then, he may look at you and lovingly say, “Give that up. Trust me more than you trust *that*. Then follow me.”

It cannot go without mentioning though what Jesus says afterwards about the wealthy. There is no hidden meaning in what he says about the camel and the needle. With greater possessions and greater wealth comes more of a temptation to trust in those things than in Jesus. This comes back to the story of the young ruler. It all depends on your view of your wealth and possessions. If God has provided you with a high level of income, it is in order that you can serve Him with it. The money is His. God will never provide someone with a high-paying job so that that person can selfishly hoard it. It just doesn't happen. Your view of money and possessions must be that God has provided it all, and you are therefore the steward of HIS money and HIS possessions. As hard as this may seem, Jesus assures us that, “with man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” With this frame of mind, the rich will enter the kingdom along with the poor, with all of them giving, receiving from, learning from, and forgiving each other along the way.

### Life Group Study Questions:

**Discussion:**

How is wealth viewed in our society? How is wealth viewed in Scripture?

**Understanding/Application:**

The 'rich young ruler' trusts in himself more than he trusts in Jesus to provide. Do you ever see yourself doing this? What things are hardest to trust God for?

The young ruler insists that he has kept all of God's commandments since he was young. How do you "measure up" to the Ten Commandments? Don't leave out Jesus' inclusion of lust as adultery, anger as murder, etc. in Matthew 5. How have you done at keeping God's commands? What does this say about your attempt to trust yourself rather than a perfect God?

How do you view your finances and possessions? Is there anything that you would not give up if God asked you to? Be honest with yourself.

**Further Scripture:**

Psalm 51

Luke 12:22-34

Matthew 6:24

1 Corinthians 10:14

## Mark 10:35-52

*“Humility is to make a right estimate of one’s self”  
– Charles H. Spurgeon*

The narrative involving James and John is a little harder to swallow than the other accounts in Mark 10. It’s somehow easier to believe that the Pharisees and a mysterious ‘rich young man’ would get it wrong than that Jesus’ two closest disciples. On the other hand, it helps in our daily struggle when we see that sometimes even the strongest of the disciples just simply didn’t get it.

James and John approach Jesus to ask him if they could be seated at His right and left sides “in his glory.” They want the places of authority and fame once Jesus is glorified, whether that means on earth or in heaven. Jesus chooses to address the reality of what they are asking. He again corrects their misunderstanding of the kingdom of God. He acknowledges that the “glory” they ask of isn’t His to grant, but rather the Father’s. However, He doesn’t leave their question unanswered. He calls their attention to His cup and His baptism, or His suffering and death here on earth. He asks them if they are prepared to do the same. In doing this, Jesus redirects their attention to the only true picture of glory that can be seen on earth: serving and suffering. Glory on this earth consists of putting yourselves last and others first. We have the example of the glory that Christ achieved while on earth was the ultimate form of service: giving his life as a ransom for many.

Frequently in the gospels, the people who are acknowledged as best understanding the kingdom of God are the most outcast and downtrodden by the earth’s standards. Jesus says it himself in verse 31, that the first will be last, and the last will be first. Notice that the people who are mentioned as misunderstanding, abusing, or failing to grasp Jesus’ teachings in Mark 10 are all people regarded as “first” by the standards of the world. The Pharisees were considered one of the most respected groups of that day. The young man was a prominent religious and civic leader. James and John were considered Jesus’ two of the most faithful and respected disciples. Yet the people who are commended and welcomed by Jesus are the ones who were almost non-existent in the social pecking order of society: the children and the blind beggar, Bartimaeus.

Don’t misunderstand this: it is not a bad thing to be accepted or respected by men. Many people are respected in some circles because of their trust and faithfulness to God. But those of us who find no one opposing them and everyone exalting them should take note: Jesus tells us that whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

So what is the answer? How does one humble himself? According to Mark 10, it is relatively simple. You learn to trust Jesus as a young child would trust their

provider, and acknowledge what you truly are: a sinner. Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, begins his approach to Jesus as we all should: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

### **Life Group Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

How is does our culture view greatness?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

Have you ever found yourself like James and John asking Jesus for a position that would only exalt yourself?

Compare how you approach God in prayer with the attitude of Bartimaeus in verses 46-52. See also Luke 18:9-14. Does your prayer look more like the Pharisee or the tax collector?

What practical steps can you take to trust more in Jesus and less in yourself?

How can you become more of a servant?

#### **Further Scripture:**

Isaiah 66:2

Matthew 18:1-4

Philippians 2:3-11

James 4:6

1 Peter 5:6-11

# Chapter Eleven



## Mark 11:1-11

*“Heal my heart and make it clean. Open up my eyes to the things unseen. Show me how to love like you have loved me. Break my heart for what breaks yours. Everything I am for your kingdom’s cause as I walk from earth into Eternity... Hosanna!”*

*- Hosanna, as recorded by Hillsong United*

Chapter 11 is the beginning of the “Passion” week: the week leading to Jesus crucifixion and resurrection. The chapter opens with Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This text is an example of a biblical story that has been talked about so much that many people are tempted to disregard its details. There is a certain tendency to think, “Yeah, yeah... Jesus rides in on a donkey; people lay down leaves and coats and sing “Hosanna.” I know this one.” But instead of succumbing to this dismissive way of thinking, let’s look the details which are quite significant.

First, what is significant about the donkey? Why not a horse or a camel? And why was Jesus so specific about which donkey He would ride into the city? The answer comes from Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Jesus is fulfilling the Messianic prophecy of His coming. The Prophet Zechariah said the Messiah would come in this manner, and so Jesus did.

Not only is Jesus’ mode of entry significant because God said it would happen that way, but it also carries meaning about the nature of Jesus’ Messiahship. The donkey was not a militaristic beast. Jesus didn’t ride in on a stallion, as we would expect of a general or war commander. Instead, He came “humbled and mounted on a donkey”. This is something that the people of Israel missed. They believed Jesus to be the Davidic Messiah and thought that he had come to overthrow Rome, either politically or martially. As we’ve already seen throughout Mark, they did not understand that He has come to bring peace.

Note Jesus’ precise description of the donkey. It couldn’t be just any donkey, but was specifically named for this task. It was a colt, *the foal of a donkey*. Moreover, this colt had never been ridden before. It was young, wild, and had never been broken. Can you see the metaphor here of Jesus choosing to enter Jerusalem on a beast that had never been tamed? Even in this, He sits as Lord over the unruly, bringing peace with him, both literally and figuratively, doing what no one else had ever done.

Now, what can we make of the coats and branches? There is a story in 2 Kings (Chapter 9) where Elisha sends a prophet to declare that God wants Jehu to be the King of Israel. However, a guy named Joram was already “King of Israel.”

Essentially, the prophet was announcing that God was rectifying the rule of the Israelites...a holy revolution of sorts. Look what happened when Jehu announced this news to his fellow commanders,” ‘Thus and so he (the prophet) spoke to me (Jehu), saying, “thus says the LORD, I anoint you king over Israel.” Then in haste every man of them TOOK HIS GARMENT AND PUT IT UNDER HIM on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, ‘Jehu is king’ (emphasis added).” The people welcoming Jesus were looking to Him as king. They weren’t expecting crucifixion, but instead revolution.

The people even quote Psalms about the coming Messiah. Psalm 118:25 says, “*Save us, we pray, O LORD!*” This is the people’s cry to Jesus. For the phrase, “save us, we pray,” (hoshi ‘ah na’ in Hebrew) when translated to Greek becomes “hosanna!” The very next verse in Psalm 118 reads, “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!*” They are recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and begging Jesus to save them from Roman oppression. And this is exactly what Jesus is here to do, but not as they understood or wanted it. He comes not to free them from Rome but from sin, death, and separation from the Father. Just as Jesus knew where the colt would be tied that he would ride in on, surely He knew that their salvation would come as a result of his sacrifice: His death. Yet, He did not enter incognito. He did not try and sneak into the city. Instead, He rode to His death in triumph, for Jesus knew that the Father would secure His victory, and there was no need for Him to hide.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

We’ve seen a lot of displays throughout Mark of Jesus’ Messiahship. How has your view of Christ been changing and growing since the first week of our study?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

What is so significant about the Messiah? Why is His coming so important?

What do you find significant about Jesus’ entry to the city? What characteristics do you think this reveals about Him?

#### **Further Scripture:**

Psalm 118

2 Kings 9

Zechariah 9:9

## Mark 11:15-33

*“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” – Matthew 7:19*

Jesus has just fulfilled Zechariah’s and Elisha’s prophecies, but in this passage He goes on to fulfill more. One of the major acts found here is His cleansing of the temple. In Malachi 3, Malachi says that the Lord will come suddenly to His temple and refine and purify it. That’s precisely what Mark recounts here.

The events in Chapter 11 begin with Jesus cursing a fig tree. That’s right, the people declare Jesus to be king, and His first act as king is to curse a plant. Why? The curse is a teaching for those around him, namely His disciples. In the Old Testament the fig tree was used as a metaphor for Israel and its standing before God (Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10, 16; Joel 1:7). By His cursing the fig tree, Jesus is in effect judging the nation of Israel and its religious leaders. They were called to bear fruit, and they hadn’t. Therefore, they will be cursed for their uselessness to never bear fruit again. Their time is over. Through Jesus, God’s family is open to everyone on earth who would believe in Him. God’s people are no longer strictly the nation of Israel but all who have faith in Christ. [See Romans 9:6-8]

Typically, the fruit of a fig tree appears the same time as the leaves do. The leaves were present, so the fruit should have been too, but it wasn’t. Israel, although it may have looked religiously healthy, bore no fruit. This is part of what drives Jesus’ next actions in the temple. The people of Israel sought to gain fiscally from God’s ordinances. They had, as the passage from Jeremiah 7 quotes, turned the temple into a den of robbers. What should have been a place of prayer and worship was being perverted into a place of business! The people were using God and His ordinances for their own selfish gain! Jesus refused to allow it to continue. So, Jesus threw them out and cleansed, or refined, the practices of the temple to yet again assert His Messiahship by fulfilling the words of Malachi 3:1-4 and restore purity to the Father’s house.

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.”

When Peter approaches Jesus about the fig tree, he remembers Jesus' curse and connects it to the cleansing of the temple. He is shocked that Jesus would curse (figuratively even) His people to bear no more fruit. Jesus teaches them, saying, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him" (Isaiah uses this same metaphor for things thought to be impossible Isa 40:4, 49:11, and 54:10). Although the nation of Israel may no longer be the ones who will bear fruit for God, His point is that they should trust God in what He's doing. Trust that He is in control and that He has a plan for His people. Trust that He will remove whatever is hindering them from bearing fruit for God, He is powerful enough to do so and those who believe in Him can have confidence in that; even for things that seem impossible. [See Romans 11]

Many people want to misuse Jesus' teaching here on prayer for their own twisted prosperity gospels. People want to say that if you pray and believe, you too can have the God of creation as your own personal genie. They feed people the lie saying, "He'll do whatever you want, as long as you believe." Followers of Christ, on the other hand, must remember to *follow Christ* and the example He set for us. Consider Mark 14:36 when Jesus says "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Jesus understands the two most important things about praying with faith, and teaches us accordingly. First of all, He knows that all things are possible for God. Even more importantly, He admits that just because it is possible doesn't mean it's God's will. In the end, our will always, ALWAYS yields to God's. Reading Jesus' teachings in Mark 11 through this lens will reveal a prayer with faith in God's power AND His will, not our own.

Lastly, we see the Sanhedrim questioning Jesus. They ask by what authority He has cleansed the temple. The Pharisees and religious elites constantly challenged Jesus' actual teachings. (i.e. is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, why don't his disciples fast etc.). This time, instead of repeating what has already failed so many times before, they question not the uprightness of the teaching, but the authority. Jesus, in turn, asks them about John the Baptist's authority. This puts them in a dilemma, and for fear of consequences they say they do not know. If they confessed that John's message was from heaven, then they would also have to confess that Jesus' was too. Their confession of ignorance, however, demonstrates that they have no basis on which to assess Jesus' ministry. If they do not know whether John the Baptist was from God, they cannot know whether Jesus is either. Faced with such hostility, Jesus refuses to answer his opponents' question and exposes their ignorance and lack of sincerity. He won't play by their rules. By now, Mark's audience knows confidently it is by His own authority, the authority of God, that Jesus does all these things because He is the Messiah sent to bring redemption.

## **Life Group Study Questions**

### **Discussion:**

In what ways do people today try to use God, Jesus, and the Gospel for their own selfish gain?

### **Understanding/Application:**

What can we learn from Jesus' actions and the heart of God in this text?

In what ways do you attempt to use Jesus for your gain rather than submit to His authority?

Is there anything that God is trying to teach you that you are refusing to learn?

What does your prayer life look like? Do you pray for God's will or for your own? Do you have faith that His will really is better than yours?

### **Further Scripture:**

Romans 9-11

Galatians 5:22

Mark 4:20

Luke 3:8-9

# Chapter Twelve



## Mark 12:1-27

*“Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander the Great, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, he shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined...” – Philip Schaff*

In the first half of chapter 12, Jesus has some very interesting conversations with some of the religious leaders of Israel. First, Jesus tells a parable about tenants and a landlord. The landlord planted a vineyard and corresponds to God, while the tenants, whom occupied a special place of blessing and responsibility from God, represent the nation of Israel throughout their history, which starting with Abraham in Genesis 12. The parable parallels the history of the Old Testament, where God sends messengers to remind His people of their calling and responsibility of obedience. The prophets who speak the words of God are continually rebelled against and mistreated. Then, the owner sends His son but the tenants kill him which is a prediction of the death of Jesus at the hands of the Jews. The conclusion of this story is that the tenants will be destroyed, and the vineyard will be taken away and given to others. This means that because of the rebellion and unbelief of the Jewish people, the place of blessing and salvation that they were waiting on will be taken from them and given to others (the Gentiles). The Gentiles are anyone (and I mean *anyone*) who is not a Jew. So, if you didn't have a bar mitzvah, you are a Gentile. This is, no doubt, very offensive to the Jews who are Jesus' audience (v.12). The image Jesus gives is from Psalm 118:22 that they are builders who have rejected a stone that has become the most important part of the building (symbolizing the very Messiah they had been waiting for).

Why did the Jewish people reject Jesus as the Messiah? One reason is that Jesus did not meet all of the expectations that they had for the Messiah. The Jewish people thought that the Messiah was going to be an earthly king and a military leader, who would take up arms and lead the Israelites into battle and free them from the current oppression of the Romans. These people longed for the “good old days,” back when David was King and the nation of Israel enjoyed freedom, prosperity, might, and prominence among the nations. Jesus came along fulfilling the Messianic prophesies, but many things about His rule looked very differently than what the Jews expected. Instead of seeking to be lifted up Himself, He sought to serve others and spent time with those considered the least in society. He did not take up arms against the Romans and attempt to free the Jewish people from slavery, but instead He proclaimed the coming reign of God through a Gospel of faith and repentance. He came to deal with a much bigger problem than the Romans. He came to deal with sin: the sin of the Jews, the sin of the Romans that made them put Jewish people into slavery, the sin of you and the sin of me. Jesus isn't concerned with the surface symptoms of our sin: He is concerned with its root. In order to deal with sin, the rebellion of

mankind, He would voluntarily be put on a cross to bear our punishment through torture and death. This was humbling, almost unfathomable news to the Jewish people of His day who were expecting a different outcome for their lives than to be called to take up their own crosses of self-denial and follow their long-awaited Messiah dying to His. This is the very reason why Peter rebuked Jesus in Mark 6 after He told the disciples that He was going to have to die. Other places in Scripture (for instance the entire chapter of Romans 11) elaborate on why things have taken place this way. In addition to Jesus getting to the root of things with sin, Paul gives another reason that things have happened this way: the fact that God desires the salvation of all, not just the Jews. In Romans 11, Paul says that God in His sovereignty has brought about the Messiah in such an offensive and humbling way because He wanted salvation to be opened up to the Gentiles. Jesus was so offensive to Jewish people in order to a) point out their own pride and self-righteousness that He was dying on the cross for, and b) so that in their pride they would inevitably reject Him and salvation would be sent out to the Gentiles. Paul goes on to say that these purposes were not final, however, but meant for some Jews to get to see the Gentiles enjoying the salvation of God, become jealous of them, and come back to God in humility and repentance and believe the Gospel for themselves. Paul then ends the chapter with a praise song because God's plan of salvation is for the entire world and not only for one people group.

In v.13-27, we see two more accounts of Jesus pointing out the sin of the Jewish religious leaders were trying to trap Him. The first question they ask Him about paying taxes is quite impressive. Basically, they approach him with a no-win situation. If He answers that you should not pay taxes to the Romans, then He could be handed over and reported for treason against the government. However, if He affirms that they should pay taxes to the Romans, He loses credibility with the Jewish community. He's trapped, right? Not quite. Jesus shows brilliance here. In asking them whose image is on the coin, He is invoking another image-bearing metaphor that they were familiar with. The implied question is: "Okay, Caesar's image is on the coin...but whose image is on you?" This is profound because as Scripture-reading Jews, they would have been very familiar with Genesis where God creates human beings in His very image. Through this, Jesus essentially says, "Yes, you live in Caesar's world, give to him what is his. But you are made in the image of God, so give all of yourselves to God." This is quite a meaningful way for Jesus to not only sidestep a trap but also to teach them that God requires the devotion of every part of our lives.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

How do you see the Jewish attitudes displayed in this text also displayed towards Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Understanding/Application:**

Do you, like the Jewish people of Jesus' day, have expectations of God that would make you mad if He did not meet? What are they?

Do you ever try to trap God instead of responding in obedience?

How do Jesus' words about "giving to God what is God's" challenge you? How does this affect the way that you view your life?

**Further Scripture:**

Matthew 22.1-14

Isaiah 6.8-13

Isaiah 61

Acts 28.23-30

Romans 11

## Mark 12:28-44

*“We love because, He first loved us. – 1 John 4:19*

In this section a teachable scribe holds a friendly dialogue with Jesus asking Him what appears to be an important question. “What is most important for us to do?” Jesus’ answer is that first we should love our God with every part of our being. This is a valuable lesson especially in our Southern, Bible-belt culture that attempts to take Christianity and turn it into a list of rules that you can follow to obtain a reward.

Jesus here clarifies what our hearts and actions should be motivated by: love for God. I should obey God and strive for righteousness not because I am trying to earn God’s favor or get something from Him—but because I am humbled by His grace which I can never earn and in light of that I love Him with all that I am. We are not supposed to serve Him out of fear or a sense of duty; that is not what God is interested in. He is not looking for a soldier to obey orders. He is after our hearts. Everything that we do in response to Him should be motivated by an unfathomable sense of gratitude and love for Him because of what He has done for us. This is so very important because when you try to do religion without a heart change resulting in sincere love, all you are left with is behavior modification and a Pharisaical self-righteousness, and we’ve already seen in Mark how Jesus has strong words for the Pharisees who sought to serve God but did not love Him. As the young scribe said, God does not delight in sacrifices or burnt offerings—only in a heart of love that seeks to serve Him. We see here that Jesus takes things deeper – it is not the outer actions that are indicative of where we are spiritually instead it is our inward motives.

Jesus’ second answer to the scribe’s question is that we should love our neighbor as our-self. This call of Jesus to love and serve others as much as we love and care for ourselves is indicative of our heart change towards loving God. It logically follows that if our hearts pine with affection for Christ, then one of the ways that we practically show that love is by loving others who are made in His image. Just as Matthew 25 says, when we serve others we are in essence serving Jesus. This may sound like an easy task at first glance, but let’s think about it a bit further. What if we really loved our neighbors as we love ourselves? What if we cared about putting food on our poor neighbor’s tables just as much as we care about providing food for ourselves? What if our checkbooks reflected that we cared about others just as much, if not more than ourselves? What if we thought about others as much as we think about ourselves? If we took that level of self-denial and love for others seriously, I think our lives would tell a much better story of the Gospel we preach. A few verses later in this passage, Jesus warns about having the heart of the Scribes whose’ lives do not exhibit a sacrificial love for God and for others. Instead of seeking to serve, they try to get the best seats at the table. They seek to bring attention and honor to themselves wherever they go. They even exploit widows and the oppressed all the while

pretending to be pious. So in essence, right after Jesus tells us to love God and others, He points to a group of people and says, “By the way, that’s what it looks like to *not* do what I just told you to do.” This self-gratifying and self-glorifying attitude is something that we have to constantly be on guard for, because it is so ingrained in our sin natures. It requires constant repentance and running to Jesus for Him to conquer sin and free us from selfishness in order to focus on Him and His glory. We do well to carefully consider the examples Jesus tells us to beware of and examine our own lives to see if they resemble those motivations in any way.

Jesus ends this chapter with the observation of a woman who does love God and others more than herself, and her actions show it. She shows that she loves others as much as she loves herself. She doesn’t just give out of her abundant excess, but she gives sacrificially to provide for others. Jesus looks at her and remarks that her few coins amount to more than the people who dumped piles of money into the baskets. Again, He goes back to the fact that what are really important are the heart-level motivations. There are people in the temple who look like they are sacrificially doing a lot, but in reality they are hardly sacrificing. In contrast, the woman looks as though she is doing little, but she is actually pouring out her life because she loves God with everything that she has. This poor widow stands as a humbling example for all of us who would genuinely try to love others as ourselves.

### **LifeGroup Study Questions:**

#### **Discussion:**

Can you think of other implications to Jesus’ statement of the most important commands?

If Jesus were warning us today (like with the Scribes), what would He say to beware of?

#### **Understanding/Application:**

What are some practical ways that you can love your neighbor as yourself?

Is your heart-level motivation for obeying God love for Him?

Do you love God with everything you have? With your soul and affections? With your mind and thoughts? With your physical body? With your money?

Are any of your actions or motivations self-glorifying like the Scribes?

### **Further Scripture:**

Deuteronomy 6.5  
Matthew 22.37-38  
Luke 9.23-27  
Luke 18.9-14